

Meningococcal Immunizations for Preteens and Teens

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Jessica MacNeil] Welcome to this podcast on meningococcal immunizations for preteens and teens. I'm Jessica MacNeil. Here to discuss this topic is Dr. Manisha Patel, a pediatrician and epidemiologist with CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. Thanks for coming, Dr. Patel.

[Dr. Patel] Thanks for having me.

[Jessica MacNeil] Dr. Patel, tell us about meningococcal disease.

[Dr. Patel] Meningococcal disease is a rare but serious bacterial infection. Some people carry the bacteria that cause it in the back of their nose or throat, but most don't get sick from it. We don't know why, but for a small number of people, the bacteria spread to the areas around the brain and spinal cord, causing meningitis. The bacteria can also cause infections in the bloodstream.

[Jessica MacNeil] Two words you just used jumped out at me—"serious" and "rare." Please tell us more.

[Dr. Patel] Meningococcal meningitis and bloodstream infections can be very serious, even deadly. The infections progress quickly. Someone can go from being healthy to very ill in 48 hours or less. Even with antibiotic treatment, 10 to 15 out of every 100 people infected with meningococcal disease will die. Many of those who survive will have long-term health issues and disabilities, such as loss of limbs, deafness, nervous system problems, or brain damage. Thankfully, meningococcal disease is not very common. We see fewer than 600 cases each year in the United States.

[Jessica MacNeil] Are some people more at risk than others?

[Dr. Patel] Yes. It is most common in babies, teens, and young adults, as well as in people with certain medical conditions that affect the immune system. Meningococcal disease can also spread wherever large groups of people gather together, like on college campuses. Outbreaks have been reported on college campuses in the past few years.

[Jessica MacNeil] How would someone know if they have meningococcal disease?

[Dr. Patel] The symptoms depend on what part of the body is affected, but in general, people should look for the following symptoms: a sudden fever, a really bad headache that is sometimes described as the worst headache of your life, neck stiffness, a dark purple rash, nausea, vomiting, confusion, increased sensitivity to light, or sleepiness. Since meningococcal disease is so serious, people who have any of these symptoms should seek medical attention immediately.

[Jessica MacNeil] What should parents do to protect their children from meningococcal disease?

[Dr. Patel] Getting preteens and teens vaccinated can help protect them against meningococcal disease and can potentially save their lives. There is one meningococcal vaccine that all 11 to 12 year olds *should* get, with a booster at age 16. This vaccine, known as Menactra or Menveo, helps protect against four of the five most common types, or serogroups, of meningococcal disease. For protection against the other common type of meningococcal disease, serogroup B, 16- to 18-year-olds can get a different vaccine, known as Bexsero or Trumenba. For best protection, Bexsero requires two doses, while Trumenba requires three doses. When someone starts this vaccine series, they should be sure to complete it with the same brand for all the doses. Talk with your teen's doctor about which meningococcal vaccines your child needs.

[Jessica MacNeil] Do these vaccines have side effects?

[Dr. Patel] Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. However most of the reported side effects to meningococcal vaccines are mild, such as redness or pain where the shot was given, muscle or joint pain, or fever. Most of the time, these side effects only last for a few days. Serious side effects are rare.

[Jessica MacNeil] Can meningococcal vaccines be given at the same time as other vaccines recommended for preteens and teens?

[Dr. Patel] Yes, that is safe to do and brings up an important point I'd like to make. In addition to meningococcal vaccine, there are three other vaccines recommended for all preteens and teens. The flu vaccine is recommended every year. All preteens and teens should also get the HPV and Tdap vaccines at 11 or 12 years old. HPV vaccines help protect both boys and girls from human papillomavirus infections that most commonly cause cancer. Tdap vaccines help protect against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis, which is commonly called whooping cough. There are many opportunities for vaccination, so I recommend parents take advantage of health check-ups, and sports or camp physicals to make sure their child is up to date on all their vaccines.

[Jessica MacNeil] Dr. Patel, do you have any advice for families who are concerned about how much vaccines cost?

[Dr. Patel] For families with health insurance, their insurance often covers the cost of all the recommended vaccines. Children 18 years and younger may be eligible to get vaccines at no cost through the Vaccines for Children, or VFC, program, if they're Medicaid-eligible, uninsured, American Indian, or Alaska Native. Parents can find a VFC provider by contacting their local health department.

[Jessica MacNeil] Where can our listeners get more information about meningococcal vaccines?

[Dr. Patel] Listeners can go to cdc.gov/meningococcal. That's m-e-n-i-n-g-o-c-o-c-c-a-l.

[Jessica MacNeil] Thank you, Dr. Patel. Remember, preteens and teens need the protection of vaccines to help keep them healthy. It could save their lives.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.